

Finding a Queen

By Kitty Cooper

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There are several good pointers to keep in mind when you have to find a queen, in either trumps or a side suit.

Count the missing high card points

When an opponent opens the bidding or overcalls you have a lot of information about the placement of the high cards. A helpful technique for visualizing the missing points is suggested by Mike Lawrence in his book on How to Read Your Opponent's Cards: add your high card points to dummy's and subtract that total from 40; this gives you the total high card points the opponents have. As the play progresses, subtract each honor card you see from the total; sometimes you will know where all the remaining high cards are by trick three or four.

For example, you open 1♠, your opponent overcalls 1NT (16-18) and your partner bids 2♠ which ends the auction. A club is led and right hand opponent plays the king. You add your points to dummy's and the total is 21. You are missing a queen, who has it? Add the three for RHO's king to 16 and you get 19. When you add that to the 21 you and dummy have, there are no points left for RHO so the notrump bidder has the missing queen.

Remember to fit the high card evidence in with the bidding you have heard. The failure to bid can be as informative as an overcall. Suppose you open in third seat and end up playing the hand. After several tricks your RHO, a passed hand has shown up with an ace in one suit and a king and a queen in another suit. How likely is it that he has the missing queen? Not likely in these modern times as that would give him eleven points, which most players would open.

Shortness is more likely to be with the overcaller

The adage "finesse with eight ever, nine never" is no longer valid when an opponent overcalls. Since overcaller already has five or more cards in one suit, there is less room in his hand for other cards. Missing four cards including the trump queen, it is better odds to play the overcaller for a singleton and take a finesse against his partner, rather than to play for the drop. When missing five cards, finesse against overcaller's partner since, again, the trump shortness is more likely to be in the overcaller's hand.

The last tip about shortness applies even more strongly to an opponent who preempts. However, since a preemptor frequently has a singleton, when he leads his own suit his singleton is likely to be in trumps, but when he leads a side suit it is likely to be his singleton and he will have two or more trumps.

To find the Queen of trump: Consider the opening lead

If you get a trump lead, the opening leader almost surely doesn't have the queen of trump. Conversely, when you don't get a trump lead, the opening leader may have the queen. This is particularly true on auctions where a trump lead is likely because the opponents want to cut down

ruffs that they expect declarer will want to take in dummy. Another time they lead trumps is when they perceive that there is no attractive alternative.

This article was co-authored by Kitty's husband, the late Steve Cooper, and previously appeared in the District 17 newsletter. ♣